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Low

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Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Josh:

Thanks for your two letters. The first one was entirely clear, and I shall also be absent from the conference on aging. The enigmatic part of your letter was your statement about seeing me in Bar Harbor. Are you attending the study section meeting or the symposium, or both? In any case it will be good to see you again.

The Science article was interesting, as always, though I recognized many points that we had discussed long ago. I hope you will write one some time about slightly higher level biological problems. Given some method of self replication, of some degree of accuracy, there must be a host of ways in which several such units might be aggregated for more efficient control over the environment. Are linkages always linear? Are there other methods of recombination? Is recombination always a regular occurrence in any self reproducing system? Etc., etc. I raise such points partly so that biologists will have more to think about. The questions of self-reproducing molecules seems to me to be largely a chemical problem (in the sense that the chemist's techniques are the ones of greatest utility), whereas studies of potential recombinational mechanisms probably require the methods of the geneticist.

I would like to know your experience with the Kennedy Foundation. The Wisconsin history is something like this. A group of the Kennedy family met here perhaps a year ago with several local people representing neurology, physiology, pediatrics, and genetics. I didn't have much interest at the time, for I wasn't sure what we could do as a genetics group that would really advance their purposes and at the same time be the kind of genetics research that we would like to do here.


Despite this, perhaps because of Dean Bowers' enthusiasm for genetics or perhaps autonomously within the Kennedy group, there has been more and more suggestions of a genetics program in mental retardation. At one stage Dean Bowers suggested that I should be the head of such an institution, but I have convinced him that this isn't the right thing to do. What I would like for the Kennedy's to do is start immediately to support Harry Waisman's program (which is something that they should be interested in) and let Wisconsin gradually evolve a program in mental retardation research. If genetics fits into this, fine; but if not, I think there are plenty of things to do.

Meanwhile we have a program going that I'm very happy with. We have applied to NIH for support as a genetics research center. Patau has really found his niche in human cytology, and I believe that he can do as much as anyone to make human cytogenetics a respectable science. Smithies is here and working. DeMars is doing tissue cultures of galactosemic cells, homozygous and heterozygous, and hopes for some sort of segregation phenomenon. He is also culturing cells for Patau, who as I guess you know has two new trisomic syndromes with what promise to be two or three translocations. Cotterman has come and is set up to try phytoagglutinins on any and everything.

Nossal is giving a talk here tomorrow. I'm looking forward to finding out what you have been up to in this area.

Kimura is coming back for a year or two, starting in April.

Cheers,


James F. Crow

JFC/EM